



# An opportunity to improve democracy

September 10, 2018

## **President's Report** **Val Avery**

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When this month's issue of *The Report* goes to print, it will be just over a month before referendum ballots are mailed out to British Columbians asking us if we would like to see our provincial elections determined through a first-past-the-post system, or through proportional representation (PR). The second ballot question will give British Columbians the opportunity to vote for one of three proportional representation models, should PR be adopted.

This fall marks a pivotal opportunity for us to make a positive reform to our voting system, with significant evidence from numerous academic studies - some spanning decades - identifying a correlation between proportional representation systems and improved social and economic outcomes.

While we may not have first-hand experience with proportional representation in B.C., ample evidence from around the world shows us that proportional representation systems lead to higher voter turnout, greater voter satisfaction, lower income inequality, more women elected, lower national debt, and the list goes on. These are some of the reasons that over 80 per cent of OECD countries have chosen to adopt a proportional representation model.

Proportional representation models encourage cross-party collaboration. Politicians of different political stripes have to work together to develop legislation, and this results in policies that benefit a greater majority of people. More voters feel meaningfully represented by those sitting around the table.

This leads to more consistent policy over time. If we look back on the last three decades of politics in British Columbia, we see dramatic shifts in policy depending on the government elected. Without a centrist party, B.C.'s political arena is notably polarized. A newly-elected government spends much of its time undoing the work of the previous one, only to have its own policy changes reversed when power is lost.

The wild swings of the pendulum that we witness under our current first-past-the-post system make it difficult to make progress. With proportional representation, governments are empowered to build off the policy work of previous governments, because that policy was shaped together.

Throughout history, our provincial and federal electoral systems have undergone significant changes. Voting rights have expanded over the course of the twentieth century to include women, Asian immigrants, and Indigenous peoples. We've reformed political financing laws, redistributed electoral boundaries, altered the voting age, and introduced new ways to vote. Proportional representation is one more reform that makes our system more inclusive, and ultimately, more democratic. It is one more step forward in the strengthening of our political system.

HSA members adopted a 2018 convention resolution in light of the upcoming referendum calling on the union to support PR and educate members on its benefits. We know that for many across the province, supporting PR is a leap of faith. It's uncharted territory for B.C., which makes our educational efforts particularly important. The more British Columbians come to understand the benefits of PR, the more motivated we will become to bring about electoral reform. If you would like to join HSA's member outreach efforts, get in touch with our office. We would love to work with you on this important opportunity to improve our voting system.

To read the full issue of the September edition of *The Report* online, [click here](#).

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